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On the first day of summer vacation, teenaged sisters M'Rose, Elle, and Céline step out into the tropical heat of their island home and continue their headlong tumble toward adulthood. Boys, schoolyard fights, petty thievery, and even illicit alcohol make for a heady mix, as *The Zabime Sisters* indulge in a little summertime freedom. The dramatic backdrop of a Caribbean island provides a study of contrasts—a world that is both lush and wild, yet strangely small and intimate—which echoes the contrasts of the sisters themselves, who are at once worldly and wonderfully naïve.

Master storyteller Aristophane's *The Zabime Sisters* takes a keen look at some of the universal experiences of children on the cusp of growing up, in the fascinating setting of Guadeloupe. Aristophane's bold, graphic brushwork weaves a wild texture through this gentle, clear-eyed tale.

## The Zabime Sisters Details

Date : Published October 26th 2010 by First Second (first published 1996)

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Author : Aristophane Boulon , Aristophanes

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# From Reader Review The Zabime Sisters for online ebook

## Tony says

This loosely connected series of graphic vignettes follows the three Zabime sisters and some of their friends around on the first day of summer vacation on the French island of Guadeloupe. First the eldest M'Rose drags her two younger sisters Celina and Elle out of bed and off to the river, scaring Ella with a story about a sinkhole. They run into some boys they know, steal some mangoes from an orchard, and then M'Rose heads off to join a bunch of other kids waiting to see some poor kid get beaten by the local bully. Meanwhile her sisters meet up with some other friends for a picnic at a kind of clubhouse. But the events aren't really that important, it's more the general tone of a lazy summer day that's being captured. The kids all seem to be in that 8-12 age range or thereabouts, and the book and art do a very nice job of capturing the age and the sense of discovery, possibility, and social distress that can accompany it. The artwork is stark black and white inkwork with no gradations or gray washes. When coupled with the artist's very naturalistic style, the result can sometimes be very visually flat, with confusing perspective and depth. A number of times, I was taken out of the book's world by the need to stop and figure out what was happening in the panel. Still, ddefinitely worth checking out if you're someone who likes graphic storytelling that's more focused on mood than story.

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## Katlyn Campbell says

Genre: Graphic Novel

Summary: This story tells the story of three sisters traveling through their teenage years. The sisters, from the Caribbean island, experience the first pivotal changes from childhood into adulthood together one summer. The story discusses several controversial yet relevant teenage topics such as boys, alcohol, and fighting.

Critique:

A. The artwork

B. In my opinion the artwork was the weakest point in this book. It was very dark which made some pictures hard to make out. The lines also all followed a similar pattern which made all of the images in a picture blend together. No color was used, which I think could have added to this work.

C. In the very beginning of the book on pages 2 and 3 you are introduced to the setting and the three main characters. Some of these images are very dark and hard to make out. Some of the others, with the girls in their bed, have so many of the same shaped lines (in the girls hair, their blankets, beds, and pillows) that it is hard to determine what is what.

Curriculum Connection: I do not think that this book would be appropriate for school, though many of the issues are relevant to teenage life and growing up. Alcohol, stealing, boys, and fighting are all discussed and I do not believe that all parents would agree with the content.

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## Nicola Mansfield says

Reason for Reading: The plot. I enjoy stories of childhood and the setting of Guadeloupe certainly piqued my interest.

This is the story of a day in the life of the three Zabime sisters on the first day of summer vacation. Set on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe it has a unique setting of barefoot children amongst tropical flora and fauna. The girls start their day teasing one another with the most outgoing of the three, M'Rose, pulling a prank that scares the other two. The girls meet up with a couple of boys they know and lounge around taking mangoes from an orchard owned by a mean man. Here the story also divides and starts telling us a little of what has been going on so far in the boys' day. M'Rose separates from the other two sisters as a fight between the school bully and an unknown boy has been called at the crossroads at noon and the other two girls don't want to go, but M'Rose is just the type to want to watch a fight. The girls divide into two groups and both end up watching and participating in typical acts of childhood misbehaviour, neither satisfying them in the end.

This is a poignant and candid story of childhood unlike most such stories; it is not nostalgic nor does it leave one with a sense of warmth. The author has captured that grain of malice that is inherently found in children and captures it perfectly throughout the day as it surfaces through normal interaction between children and when they find themselves in distress. While the book explores this meanness, it isn't a mean story, and likewise, while the story is set in a luscious tropical environment the themes of childhood could take place anywhere, rural or urban. I thoroughly enjoyed the book and found it to be a remarkable tale that will be unforgettable for me. The book is suggested for young adults but I think adults are going to enjoy the book on a different level, already having experienced youth and now seeing this acrimony in their own children and recognising it for the seed that a child grows out of with the proper nurturing.

The art must also be mentioned as it is spectacular. It is done heavily in black ink and very expressive and realistic. Though the book is oversized, I only wish it could have been bigger as some of the panels seem too small to contain this type of art as the thickness of the black brush strokes sometimes lose the detail in other areas as they are squished into a small frame. The true beauty of the art is visible in the larger frames.

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## **Rocktopus says**

The art in this book is full of contrast - the shading is nearly black and white, and the marks are alternately rough/hasty and highly precise. Reading the panels sometimes feels like leaving a movie theater and getting to a sunny street before your pupils have properly contracted. I appreciated the chaotic style of the drawings as an extension of the story's spontaneous nature, but I can see where some readers would find it jarring and difficult.

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## **Dov Zeller says**

What interests me most about this book is the constant negotiation between teasing play and real conflict. The kids in this book are in almost every scenario trying to navigate the strange dynamics that come as they test their connections and their roles and power within these connections.

It all begins with the mother telling her daughters on their first day of summer vacation, that they can't go out and play by the riverbank as they had planned (or at least were arguing about). Their mother is, though, only teasing (which, along with the girls' bickering, sets the groundwork for their adventures and struggles). The three sisters do go to the riverbank to play, and their day turns into a bit of an odyssey. It is an Odysseyan journey through a day which is in some ways, terribly mundane, but in others quite extraordinary. There are many trials and tribulations, a real odyssey as they try to make sense of the behaviors of their peers, and their

own behavior and interests, beliefs and desires.

Every situation has the potential to be one thing, but turns out another way. A boy breaks his father's pipe, and they might help him, but when that isn't an option, they taunt him instead. The girls steal mangoes and when they are confronted by the orchard owner's son, they become indignant and a bit cruel. Affectionate teasing seems to always have a hint of cruelty in it, or to turn cruel, as if they haven't grown into it yet, there is still too much for them to learn about empathy and the strangeness of life.

Most of the vignettes are funny, and affectionate, but most of them also turn into something a little more bungled, at times even sinister, though in the end, the affection often returns.

The larger overall plot that connects these shorts is a fight taking place between two boys from school, one who is known for being a bit of a bully, Vivien, and the other, well, it seems no one is quite sure who is fighting Vivien and his big bad doberman. And all the kids learn yet another thing about the theater of appearances.

There is something unconventional about this book. There are certain things it does not offer the reader in terms of drama and closure. But I really appreciated the art and the mood, the playfulness with hints of sadness. There is something tragic about the misunderstandings and fear of vulnerability that lead people to harm each other, though the book itself is not tragic.

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### **Toni says**

This is the story of a day in the life of the three Zabime sisters on the first day of summer vacation. Set on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe it has a unique setting of barefoot children amongst tropical flora and fauna. This is a poignant and candid story of childhood unlike most such stories; it is not nostalgic nor does it leave one with a sense of warmth. The author has captured that grain of malice that is inherently found in children and captures it perfectly throughout the day as it surfaces through normal interaction between children and when they find themselves in distress. While the book explores this meanness, it isn't a mean story, and likewise, while the story is set in a luscious tropical environment the themes of childhood could take place anywhere, rural or urban. I thoroughly enjoyed the book and found it to be a remarkable tale that will be unforgettable for me. The book is suggested for young adults but I think adults are going to enjoy the book on a different level.

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### **Lindsay says**

This felt like it could have been divided into distinct stand-alone graphic novels. I came to like it by the end, but it took some time as the storylines switched so frequently. I liked the characters, but would have liked to see further development (a good portion of the novel had nothing to do with the sisters). Overall, I'm intrigued by Aristophane and will hunt around to get my hands on more of his work.

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### **Lindy says**

Subtle, immersive, unusual. Aristophane's expressive brush style carries a wisp of melancholy - or perhaps

it's school summer holiday boredom - yet there is also an unsentimental aspect to his storytelling that makes these episodes in the lives of three young sisters feel authentic. The more I read this, the better I liked it. Readalike: Marble Season by Gilbert Hernandez.

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## **Thing Two says**

This is the tale of the first day of summer for three sisters on the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe. It is a simple story of sisters, friends, childhood freedoms and struggles. What makes this interesting are the intricate panels which accompany each frame of the story. If a picture is worth a thousand words, this book is "War and Peace".

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## **Emilia P says**

Meh. I'm supposed to appreciate this cuz its by a French Caribbean dude, right? And it's all slice-of-lifey? Well, it is so aimless and sort of lightly put that it amounts to nothing much. So some island kids get drunk on their parents rum and watch some boys fight. So what? However, I did think the art was pretty good, really inky and dark and somehow emotional. The story, what there was of it, did not really measure up. Oh well.

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## **Candice M (tinylibrarian) says**

I found this title to be just okay. While the art style was interesting (ok, I confess, it reminded me of Jon J. Muth's sketches of the Sandman), the plotline was kind of boring to me. Don't get me wrong - the plot line and dialogue seemed realistic but I just kept thinking that my teens are too busy living this to care about reading this. It seemed like it is more of a title that would appeal to adults thinking nostalgically of the first day of summers long past.

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## **Heather says**

This was a quick read, but The Zabime Sisters packs a punch. The author, Aristophane Boulon, was born in the Caribbean archipelago of Guadeloupe, and later moved to Paris to study art. His drawing style, a dry brush in black and white with little gray, is incredibly versatile; it can, in turn, evoke warmth, distance, and a wide range of emotions. The three sisters, M'Rose, Celina, and Ella, are on vacation from school, and this little window on their world, somewhere in the Caribbean, shows us how intense that world can be; love and hate, resentment, fear, the bond between sisters, and the ever shifting relationships and connections made between children. It is a true story without being sentimental.

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## **Anjan says**

Great example of elevating an art form.

This is not like any prior comic I've read. The brush work for some of these panels is deceptively rough and unrefined. It seems the illustrator/author isn't trying to draw a figure, he is having fun suggesting what can be considered a figure given certain flicks of the wrist holding the brush and the shifting thickness of lines. If I can write a sentence like that about a comic book then it meets my standard of what is art worth contemplated for aesthetics absent story. I could feel the jungle ambiance. Planes worth absorbing beyond their narrative purpose.

Story is somewhere near "high noon" and "chronicle of a death foretold", unfolding - ambling rather - towards a fight in a town square. Bunch of kids hanging out in the Caribbean jungle and the author is able to convey a feeling of the reader belong to the time and place. I'll have to find more of his works.

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### **Jan says**

On the first day of summer vacation, teenaged sisters M'Rose, Elle, and Céline step out into the tropical heat of their island home of Guadeloupe and encounter boys, schoolyard fights, petty thievery, and even illicit alcohol.

The artwork by Aristophanes is brilliant, with its intense slashes of black and white that are hypnotic and absolutely mesmerizing. I liked that the three vignettes comprising the story seemed random and unconnected, just like a lazy summer afternoon, but actually were connected by the growth of the characters, especially M'Rose. But the artwork is definitely the standout here.

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### **Marc Weidenbaum says**

Three girls make their way out of their home, leaving their worrying mother behind. One of the girls elects a seemingly more dangerous itinerary than the other two, and that path leads her not just into the proximity of imminent physical violence, but into another story entirely. She steps not just out of the close comfort of her kin, but also out of a story line -- out of one and into another.

There's something entrancing about how Aristophane tells such a simple story, or collection of stories, yet accomplishes something that feels fraught throughout with anxiety, an anxiety at odds with the storytelling's elegance.

The art plays a similar role. On the first impression, it is an impressionist relating of conversation -- there is very little actual action in the book, aside from the action of people walking and talking -- but quite quickly it becomes apparent that the drawings tell much of the story, the way characters are blotted out, the way rough textures foretell rough incidents.

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